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**Independence Seaport Museum Celebrates the Centennial Anniversary
of the Return of the Unknown Soldier from World War I on Cruiser *Olympia***

PHILADELPHIA, PA, March 22, 2021 – The [Independence Seaport Museum](#) (ISM) is honored to announce its plans to commemorate the [Centennial Anniversary of the Return of the Unknown Soldier on *Cruiser Olympia*](#). A National Historic Landmark, the U.S. Navy chose Cruiser *Olympia* to return an unknown American soldier's remains to the United States following World War I. To honor this historic milestone, ISM has proudly partnered with national organizations to present programming, unveil special exhibitions, and highlight *Olympia's* journey and the sacrifice made by members of our armed forces.

Launched in 1892, the United States protected Cruiser *Olympia* represented the best of American ingenuity and naval strategy for her generation. She was equipped with electric illumination, artificial refrigeration, rotating gun turrets and heating for crew spaces. *Olympia* rose to fame as Commodore (later Admiral) George Dewey's flagship during the Spanish-American War in 1898 and patrolled the American coast after the U.S. entered World War I. She also played a crucial role in the 1919 Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War and promoted peace in the unstable Balkan Countries. Fittingly, her final act of service was the transportation of the remains of the American Unknown Soldier from World War I from Le Havre, France, on October 25, 1921, to her destination at the Washington Navy Yard on November 9, 1921.

Given her status as the era's most famous vessel, *Olympia's* selection to bring home the remains of the Unknown Soldier served to commemorate both the ship's and the soldier's service. However, the journey home proved difficult as *Olympia* and the Unknown Soldier's Marine Detachment Unit encountered tropical storm-force winds and 20 to 30-foot waves for most of the 15-day voyage. Thanks to the crew's bravery, *Olympia* weathered the storm and safely delivered its precious cargo to the Washington Navy Yard on November 9, 1921. The Unknown Soldier's remains were laid to rest in the newly established Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. Cruiser *Olympia* was officially decommissioned in 1922, ending 27 years of service that saw two wars and thousands of American commissioned officers and enlisted sailors.

In 1957, the United States Navy donated *Olympia* to the Cruiser *Olympia* Association, which restored the ship and opened her as a museum the following year. *Olympia* was officially granted National Historic Landmark status in 1966. The association eventually transferred ownership to ISM in 1996, beginning the Museum's stewardship of *Olympia*. The Museum has since overseen further restorations and made the historic Cruiser open for touring visitors. ISM's long-term goal is to raise funds to eventually dry-dock *Olympia* to ensure her preservation for years to come.

"For many Americans, the Unknown Soldier represents the supreme sacrifice in the cause of freedom," said ISM President & CEO Peter Seibert. "As a boy, I remember visiting the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery and being so impressed by the precision and the silence of the changing of the guard. It showed me the solemnity of the story of the Unknown Soldier."

The Tomb of the Unknown is a monument dedicated to all of the missing and unknown service members who gave their lives and their identities to protect our nation. Built in 1921, the Tomb is also the final resting place of the American Unknown Soldier from World War I, and Unknowns from later wars. It is guarded at all times by the Society of the Honor Guard, who stand watch over their graves in humble reverence, ensuring the Unknowns rest in peace. The Society of the Honor Guard has partnered with the ISM to participate in its upcoming events commemorating the Centennial Anniversary.

"The flawless execution of the critical mission handed to the crew and Marines of the USS *Olympia* in 1921 set the tone for our nation to remember and honor the service and sacrifice of our Unknown Soldier," said President & Public Affairs Chair of the Society of the Honor Guard, Gavin McIlvenna. "I applaud Independence Seaport Museum for preserving *Olympia* and the legacy of the Unknown Soldier's difficult journey home so that future generations may remember the sacrifices made by so many."

On May 28, ISM will open a new exhibition aboard *Olympia* titled ***Difficult Journey Home***, which will detail the dramatic story of the Cruiser's chaotic voyage transporting the Unknown Soldier. For their annual Memorial Day ceremony on May 31, the Museum will unveil a permanent historical marker on *Olympia* that commemorates the Unknown Soldier and memorializes his story for future visitors. ISM's Centennial Anniversary events will culminate with two joint ceremonies with the Society of the Honor Guard honoring the official Centennial Anniversary of the Return of the Unknown Soldier. The first will observe the Unknown Soldier's departure from Le Havre, France, on October 25, 2021, followed by the second honoring *Olympia*'s arrival to the Washington Navy Yards on November 9, 2021.

Throughout 2021, ISM will host virtual and in-person events related to the Centennial Anniversary programming, including virtual panels discussing the history of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and an event with Opera Philadelphia to discuss their film, [Soldier Songs](#). Learn more on the events page of the [ISM website](#).

Interviews: Please contact [Billy Cook](#) to schedule interviews with ISM's President & CEO Peter Seibert, ISM Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer Mike Flynn, or President & Public Affairs Chair of the Society of the Honor Guard President Gavin McIlvenna.

Photos: Live [HERE](#).

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About Independence Seaport Museum

Independence Seaport Museum increases the awareness, knowledge, and experience of our waterways by highlighting the important role of the Delaware River through direct contact with our collections, exhibits, and the water. Our boating programs provide direct access to recreation and the scientific study of the water from the standpoints of biology and physics while art is used to represent the importance of competing uses of the river. Through our historic ships, Cruiser *Olympia* and Submarine *Becuna*, we provide the ideal platform for examining the interaction of society and water over our nation's history. Learn more about the Independence Seaport Museum at phillyseaport.org.